



Natural Resources Conservation Service
3003 N. Central Avenue, Suite 800
Phoenix, Arizona 85012-2946

phone 602.280.8801
fax 602.280.8805
web site www.az.nrcs.usda.gov

NEWS RELEASE

USDA-NRCS Release

Contact: Renee Bodine
602-280-8778
Renee.bodine@az.usda.gov

THREE STATES WORK WITH NAVAJO NATION TO DELIVER BETTER SERVICE New Utah office will serve Navajo Producers in Aneth Chapter

Assistant Chief Sara Braasch met with Navajo leaders at Tribal Headquarters in Window Rock, Arizona, March 7-8. The focus of the meeting was to improve coordination, planning and implementation of conservation on the Navajo Nation. Two historical events demonstrated a renewed commitment to provide better service – a meeting between NRCS leaders from three states with Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly and the signing of a cooperative agreement opening a new office on the reservation.

The Navajo Nation extends 27,000 square miles through the states of Arizona, Utah and New Mexico with approximately 1,300 farmers and 12,000 ranchers. The Navajo believe they are an extension of Mother Earth. Vice President Shelly's remarks in the meeting with the three state conservationists echoed this belief, "We love our Mother Earth. In a traditional way we teach it and believe it. And, I'm glad that you are here to help us with that and we will support you all the way through."

Braasch, speaking on behalf of NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster, recognized the government-to-government relationship with the Navajo Nation. "I'm pleased with the commitment from these three state conservationists who are here to do everything they can to help with your conservation goals. At the same time, we have a lot to learn about what we can do in the next Farm Bill to simplify and accelerate our efforts," she said to Vice President Shelly.

The majority of the reservation occupies about a third of the state of Arizona, where David McKay is state conservationist and seven field offices provide services to the Nation. He encouraged Navajo leaders to get involved with the upcoming 2007 Farm Bill and described how the USDA Secretary Johanns has proposed legislation that will increase conservation program funding and set aside 10 percent for socially disadvantaged producers. "According to current definitions Tribes will fit the criteria," McKay said. New Mexico state conservationist Dennis Alexander commented on the effort they are making to eliminate the difficulty of working through the bureaucracy of three states, "We are working with Arizona on the eastern side to better coordinate our services and we will continue to work on that," he said.

Sylvia Gillen, Utah State Conservationist, discussed the opening of a new office in Utah with the Aneth Chapter. The Navajo Nation works with NRCS through its Natural Resources Department, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and Chapter organizations to improve natural resources.

A cooperative agreement between the Aneth Chapter of the Navajo Nation and NRCS will establish a new office and improve natural resource conservation services to agricultural producers in southeastern San Juan County. Prior to the March 7 signing ceremony at Tribal headquarters in Window Rock, NRCS customers traveled to Monticello, Shiprock or some other distant field office.

“When we went to meet with Chapter leaders, they were very well prepared with their land use plan and had definite ideas about where they wanted to go with the land and the assistance they wanted to have,” Gillen said. Under the agreement, the Aneth Chapter will provide office space at the Chapter House and the Utah and Arizona NRCS will provide equipment and technical staff support. The goals of the agreement are to implement a coordinated resource management plan for the Chapter, to install conservation practices and provide education and information that will improve the health and productivity of the land. Gillen said she anticipates the office will open in approximately one month.

The officials at the cooperative agreement signing ceremony in Window Rock were David Felfred, Navajo Nation Council Delegate for the Aneth, Red Mesa and Mexican Water areas; Wilbur Capitn, Community Service Coordinator for the Aneth Chapter; Andrew Tso, Executive Staff Assistant for the Office of the President and Vice President of the Navajo Nation; Sylvia Gillen, Utah NRCS State Conservationist; and David McKay, Arizona NRCS State Conservationist. Don Andrews, NRCS District Conservationist in the Monticello Field Office, will supervise the new soil conservation technician who will shortly be hired to staff the new Aneth Office.

After speaking with the Vice President, Braasch and the state conservationists met with Navajo Nation Resource Committee, which is organized under the Nation’s Division of Natural Resources. A number of key staffers from each state lead by Arizona Assistant Conservationist for Operations Gerry Gonzales helped lay the groundwork for the events and agreement that took place in Window Rock.

#